DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 168 335 FL 010 171

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TITLE	Teaching the Spanish Past Tense: Theory and Practice. CILA Bulletin, No. 28.
INSTITUTION	Commission Interuniversitaire Suisse de Linguistique Appliquee (Switzerland).
PUB DATE	78
NOTE	18p.; May be marginally legible due to small print
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Form Classes (Languages); *Grammar; Higher Education; *Language Instruction; *Language Research; Learning Theories; *Linguistic Theory; Morphology (Languages); Sentence Structure; *Spanish; Syntax; Textbook Evaluation; *Verbs

ABSTRACT

This paper examines three ways in which the Spanish imperfect and preterite are theoretically conceptualized and how such conceptions are realized practically in elementary Spanish textbooks. An attempt is made to present the three approaches as constituting a theoretical progression rather than viewing them as isolated treatments of the same phenomenon. First, the traditional grammatical ideas about the preterite and imperfect from Ramsey (1894) are introduced and correlated with the presentation given in a new college text. Next, the innovations found in Stockwell et al. (1965) are examined along with their application in the elementary Spanish text of which Stockwell was the advising linguist. The traditional ideas are then compared and contrasted with the newer structuralist approach. Finally, the system devised by William Bull (1960, 1965) is examined as it is put into practice in a college oriented textbook. Bull's ideas are discussed in relation to those of Stockwell et al. in order to demonstrate the hypotheses advanced in this paper, i.e., that there is a growing trend toward a comprehensive explanation of the Spanish past tense. (Author)

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Teaching the Spanish Past Tense: Theory and Practice

This paper* examines three ways in which the Spanish imperfect and preterite are theoretically conceptualized and how such conceptions are realized practically in elementary Spanish textbooks. An attempt is made to present the three approaches as constituting a theoretical progression rather than viewing them as isolated treatments of the same phenomenon.

First, the traditional grammatical ideas about the preterite and imperfect from Ramsey (1894) are introduced and correlated with the presentation given in a new college text.

Secondly, the innovations found in Stockwell et al. (1965) are examined along with their application in the elementary Spanish text of which Stockwell was the advising linguist. The traditional ideas above are then compared and contrasted with the newer structuralist approach.

Thirdly, the system devised by William Bull (1960, 1965) is examined as it is put into practice in a college oriented textbook. Bull's ideas are discussed in relation to those of Stockwell et al. in order to demonstrate the hypothesis advanced in this paper, i.e., that there is a growing trend towards a comprehensive explanation of the Spanish past tense.

Traditional: Imperfect. Ramsey (1894) typifies the traditional treatment of the Spanish imperfect. He describes it as the tense[1]:

(a) used to express what was habitual or customary
(b) to describe the qualities of persons or things

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* I wish to thank William Flint Smith for his valuable comments on the preliminary version of this paper. I am, of course, solely responsible for the contents.

1 "The fusion of the morphological markers of aspect and other categories in such forms as the Aorist and Imperfect of the Indo-European languages, together with the restriction of this particular aspectual opposition, in most cases, to the past tense may explain why forms which are differentiated aspectually, such as the Aorist and Imperfect are traditionally referred to as tenses rather than aspectual forms of the same tense." (Comrie, 1976, 97)
The distinction between *he read, he was reading,* and *he used to read* in English is an aspectual distinction. Similarly in the Romance languages, the difference between Spanish *leyó* and *leía* is one of aspect, despite the traditional terminology, which speaks of the Imperfect as a tense, and equally of the Simple Past, also called the Past Definite, Historic, or Remote, as a time (ibid., 1).
"Tense" relates the time of a given situation to some other time (usually to the moment of speaking). "Aspect" refers to the different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation. (Holt, 1943, 6, cited in Comrie, 1976, 1–2)

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(c) generally expressed in English by *used to*[2] + infinitive or the past tense of *to be* + present participle (pp. 317; 323)

In the 1975 version of the text, *Fundamentals of Spanish Grammar*, Armitage et al. present a strikingly similar description of the imperfect, stating that it is:

(a) used to express a customary, habitual or repeated action
(b) to express a condition in the past
(c) ordinarily expressed in English by *used to* or *would* + infinitive (p. 69)

The following remnants of exercises are characteristic of the traditional approach (ibid., pp. 206–207):

The first type of exercise illustrates the descriptive function of the imperfect and involves rewriting a passage by changing the infinitive or the present tense form of the verb to the imperfect:

(1) . . . (Ser) *(It was)* un día estupendo . . .
(2) . . . Varias personas (gritar) *(were shouting)* los precios . . .

The second kind of exercise illustrates the role of the imperfect to express habitual, customary or repeated actions in the past, and involves the partial or complete translation of individual sentences:

(3) *(volver)* Todos los días (mi padre) —— *(would return)* a casa a las seis.
(4) Robert *used to visit* France every summer.

The first set, (1) and (2), employs the English translation suggested by Ramsey and the second set, (3) and (4), demonstrates that which is found in Armitage et al. An interesting question arises whether the Spanish past tense can be represented adequately through English translation (and vice versa).

"Aspect", as it applies to the past tense, consists of a number of semantic features: perfective/imperfective, habitual/continuous, and progressive/nonprogressive[3]. Various languages express aspect by either

2 *Used to* is a quasi-auxiliary which characterizes the past era as a whole. (See Joos, 1964, 29) In the Past Tense only, English has a separate "habitual" using this form. It is replaceable by the non-habitual equivalent, i.e., the non-habitual does not exclude habitual meaning (Comrie, 1976, 124). See pages 33–34 of this paper.

3 The feature "habitual" is presented as describing "a situation which is characteristic to an extended time" (Comrie, 1976, 27–28). The common meaning of "progressive" is accepted, i.e., "progressive" refers to a verb form which expresses an action or a state ongoing at the moment of speaking (or time

combining or separating these semantic features, thus causing difficulties in the translation from one language to another. For example, in the Spanish past tense, a clear distinction is made between the simple past and the imperfect:

(5) Juan trabajó aquí.
'John worked here' (Simple Past)

(6) Juan trabajaba aquí.
'John was working here' (Progressive)
'John used to work here' (Habitual, Imperfective)

English, however, separates the "habitual", e.g., John used to work here, and the "progressive", e.g., John was working here (when I arrived), where Spanish combines them. In addition, a sentence like (7):

(7) John worked here.

may have either the simple past meaning or the "habitual" meaning.

Thus, it can be said that, "while the *-ing* and *used to* patterns do consistently signal the choice of the imperfect, the simple English past tense is completely ambivalent, and speakers of English, as a result, are not trained to observe aspectual differences" (Bull, 1965, p. 70).

Traditional: Preterite. Three separate uses of the preterite are described by Ramsey (1894). Below, each one will be discussed individually in connection with related ideas in *Fundamentals.*

Ramsey states that, "the preterite expresses a past action as occurring at some particular time, understood or designated, of which no part is continued to the present . . ." (p. 317) Furthermore, "an unspecified time is, necessarily, not connected with either past or present, except in the mind of the speaker. If he has only the past in view, he uses the preterite tense . . ." (ibid., p. 322).

Similar statements are found in Armitage et al. (pp. 72–73). "The preterite is often used to state a fact which in the speaker's mind, is a completed whole . . ." And, "when a physical state is definitely limited in time, it is normally expressed by the preterite (even when it takes place over a period of time)."

B. Comrie (1976) disagrees with the use of the term "completed" because it "puts too much emphasis on the termination of the situation" (p. 18). He feels that the perfectivity expressed by the preterite "puts no

spoken of) *(Webster's Seventh Collegiate Dictionary)* "Perfective" is considered as equivalent to the "Simple Past", and "imperfective" as synonymous to the "Imperfect".

more emphasis on the end of the situation than on any other part . . . rather all parts of the situation are presented as a single whole" (ibid.), and, therefore, the term "complete" should be substituted for "completed".

Comrie also comments on the second statement by Armitage et al. mentioned above. He says, "the perfective cannot be defined as describing a situation with limited, as opposed to unlimited duration; an hour, ten years, thirty years, are all limited periods, yet both perfective and imperfective forms can be used to describe such duration" (ibid., p. 17).

Consider the following examples:

(8) El gobernó treinta años.
(9) El gobernaba treinta años.

In Spanish, the difference between sentences (8) and (9) is not one of objective or subjective difference in the period of the reign; rather the former gathers the whole period of thirty years into a single complete whole, corresponding roughly to the English, 'He had a reign of thirty years' i.e., one single reign. The second sentence, (9), states, rather, that at any point[4] during those thirty years, he was indeed governing, i.e., is connected more with the internal structuring of the reign, and would be more appropriate as a background statement to a discussion of the individual events that occurred during his reign (ibid.).

The mention of the two issues under discussion is due to the traditional grammarians' concern for grammatical categories in Greek. Lyons (1968, p. 314) explains that the perfective/imperfective opposition in Greek is one of 'completion'. The Greek perfective refers to the state which results from the completion of the action or process. The opposition between the imperfective and the aorist (a Greek tense simply expressing past action without further limitation) has to do with the duration of the action or process described. Furthermore:

> The three-term opposition of perfective, imperfective, and aorist is the resultant of two binary distinctions: perfective (or completive) versus non-perfective, and durative versus non-durative. The aspectual notions of completion and duration are found, either together or singly, in many languages. (ibid., p. 315)

The following exercise in Armitage et al. (pp. 209–10) deals with the usage of the preterite and involves rewriting a paragraph by changing the infinitives to appropriate forms of the preterite:

4 This should not be confused with the "punctual" significance of the preterite referred to by many authors, among whom is Gili Gaya, who states (1973, 157): "Este significado 'puntual' que se refiere a la perfección del acto . . ."

(10) Ayer yo (ir) al cine a ver una película mexicana . . .

While this exercise (like those cited previously) does illustrate the perceptual discrimination intended by the authors, the student's task is simply one of mechanical manipulation of verb forms, in this case, of changing infinitives to preterite forms.

The second point that Ramsey makes about the preterite is that it "serves to indicate that an act came to an end or that it began" (p. 318). Armitage et al. only partially reproduce this observation, saying that "the preterite often describes the beginning of a physical state which may be expressed in English by *got* or *became*" (p. 73)[5].

Barrera-Vidal (1972) supports this characterization of the preterite, saying, "Le perfectif englobe terme initial et terme final du procès . . ." (p. 201).

Support is also found in Comrie (1976). He states that, "a perfective form often indicates the completion of a situation when it is explicitly contrasted with an imperfective form" (p. 198). In many languages that distinguish between perfective and imperfective forms, the perfective forms of some verbs[6] can be used to indicate the beginning of a situation (ingressive meaning).

For example, the simple past (or perfective past) of the verbs *saber* and *conocer* may indicate the start of a new situation as in (11) below (ibid.):

(11) Conocí a Pedro hace muchos años. (Simple past)
'I got to know Pedro many years ago.'

Another example is found in Gili Gaya (1973):

(12) Ayer supe la noticia.
'Yesterday, I learned the news.'

He states, "nos referimos al momento en que mi saber llegó a ser completo o perfecto, lo cual no se opone a que ahora y después siga sabiéndola" (p. 157).

We will return to the issue of *conocer/saber* later in this paper.

The use of the past tense in narration is discussed in Ramsey as follows: "the preterite tells the occurrences which furnish the thread of the story; the imperfect describes the scene in which they occurred." (p. 325) He continues, saying, "it is a stylistic device of literary Spanish to

5 There are no exercises which deal specifically with this point.

6 For example stative verbs, which describe enduring psychological states such as *believe, know, like, love, need,* etc. (Miller and Johnson-Laird, 1976, 474)

build up, however briefly, the picture of the circumstances with the imperfect, then, as a sort of climax, indicating with a preterite the act that took place . . ." (pp. 326–27)

A very similar comment is found in Armitage et al. (p. 72):

> In narration there are usually two types of actions: those which recount the main events of the story and those which give background to what happens but have little to do with the actual forwarding action of the story. The main events are in the preterite, the background actions are in the imperfect.

The exercises presented in *Fundamentals* (pp. 210–11) aim to cultivate a perceptual awareness of the aforementioned concept. The passages involve (1) changing infinitives and present tense forms into the preterite or imperfect, depending on which is required, and (2) translating the ambiguous English past forms into Spanish:

(13) . . . En la sala, algunas personas (bailar) . . . (Saludar [yo]) a Paco . . .

(14) . . . *Subimos* al coche . . . *Hay* mucho tráfico . . . Al llegar al café . . .

(15) . . . My friends (m.) *were eating breakfast.* I *greeted* them . . .

Such a concept does not appear to be extremely difficult for the English-speaker to grasp, however, since in English, subordinate clauses follow the same narrative rule for choice of aspect. According to Joos (1964, p. 133), temporary aspect[7] is used only for background to plot-advancing verbs; otherwise generic aspect[8] is chosen. Temporary aspect for Joos corresponds to the use here of the imperfect while generic aspect refers to the preterite.

Traditional descriptions of preterite/imperfect usage similar to those cited previously are found in the original A–LM textbook (1962, Level II). Two examples are given below:

7 Joos (1964, 107–108) states that, "temporary aspect does not necessarily signify anything about the nature of the event, which can be essentially progressive or static, continuous or interrupted, etc.; instead it signifies something about the validity of the prediction and specifically it says that the probability of its validity diminishes smoothly from a maximum of perfect validity, both ways into the past and future towards perfect irrelevance or falsity."

8 According to Joos (1964, 110–11), 'generic aspect' in the past characterizes an event confined to a certain previous era: "When, instead of characterizing, the speaker reports an event that is entirely confined to the time of speaking, he uses the generic aspect."

> The imperfect is used quite often in narrating or providing background, while the preterite is used to express an action limited within that background. *This is merely a case of a continuing action (the background) versus an action begun or ended (the event within the background)* (p. 113).
>
> (emphasis added is mine-DMR)

Gili Gaya (1973) concurs, saying that, "[el imperfecto] se emplea en narraciones y descripciones como un pasado de gran amplitud, dentro del cual se sitúan otras acciones pasadas . . ." (p. 160). He gives the following example:

(16) Cuando entraste llovía.

In (16), "la acción de *llover* era presente cuando *entraste*" (ibid., p. 161).

Comrie (1976) delves more deeply into the issue by examining the following similar example:

(17) Juan leía cuando entré.

"The first verb presents the background to some event, while the event itself is introduced by the second verb." (p. 3) *Entré* is a perfective form which presents the totality of the situation referred to, i.e., "the whole of the situation is presented as a single unanalyzable whole; with beginning, middle, and end rolled into one; no attempt is made to divide this situation into the various individual phases that make up the action of the entry." (ibid.)

In the form *leía*, reference is made to an internal portion of John's reading, while there is no explicit reference to the beginning or end of it. For this reason, the sentence is interpreted as meaning that my entry is an event that occurred during the period that John was reading, i.e., John's reading both preceded and followed my entry. (ibid., p. 4)

The difference between perfectivity and imperfectivity illustrated above is not necessarily an objective difference. It is therefore possible for the same speaker to refer to the same situation once with a perfective form and then with an imperfective one, without being self-contradictory. Consider sentence (18):

(18) John read that book yesterday; while he was reading it, the postman came.

In the first clause, John's reading is presented as a complete event. In the second clause, however, this event is 'opened up' so that the speaker is in the middle of the situation when the event of the postman's arrival occurred. (ibid.)

Structure drills presented in A–LM Unit 17 provide practice for the student with regard to this usage of the preterite and imperfect:

(19) Repetition drill: Mientras se vestìa, se quemó la leche.

(20) Free expansion drill[9]:

S: El estudiaba
a. (something interrupts)
b. (something else is going on simultaneously)

R: Cuando lo llamé, él estudiaba.
El estudiaba mucho cuando era niño.

Note once again how mechanical aspects of verb manipulation are emphasized, i.e., repetition of correct forms, substitution of one verb for another, etc. The examples presented in the traditionalist text are clearly superior with regard to training the student in perceptual discrimination[10].

The second descriptive comment referring to preterite/imperfect usage in A–LM is as follows (p. 113):

> *Length of time has nothing to do with which aspect is used.* The determining factor is the speaker's attitude toward the situation as a complete or continuing one. A century can be thought of as a single event, or a few moments may provide the background for another completed action.
>
> (Emphasis added is mine-DMR)

Examples given to illustrate this concept include (ibid.):

(21) El vivió cien años.

(22) Yo los ví en el momento en que entraban.

The significance of the emphasized portion of the statement above lies not in its value for the student of Spanish, but rather in its reference to traditional grammatical ideas.

For example, Gili Gaya (1973, p. 160) states:

> La acción pasada que expresamos en pretérito imperfecto nos interesa sólo en su duración . . . El imperfecto da a la acción verbal un aspecto de mayor duración que los demás pretéritos[11], especialmente con verbos imperfectivos . . .

A similar comment appears in Criado de Val (1961, p. 116):

> El imperfecto añade a la noción de un pasadao impreciso la referencia a una acción más o menos 'duradera'. Contrasta fuertemente su valor con el del pretérito que alude a una acción momentánea o 'puntual'.

9 S = stimulus and R = response.

10 This should not be surprising given that the aim of A-LM is undeniably mechanistic and not perceptual in nature.

11 *el pretérito perfecto absoluto,* i.e., the preterite, and *el pretérito perfecto actual,* i.e., the present perfect.

The most obvious counterexamples to this claim are sentences like (8) or (9) above, in which both the perfective and imperfective forms can be used in referring to the same length of time without any necessary implication of the duration being short or long. (Comrie, pp. 16–17)

Comrie (ibid., pp. 17–18) discusses the perfective as indicating a punctual or momentary situation:

> While it is incorrect to say that the basic function of the perfective is to represent an event as momentary or punctual, there is some truth in the view that the perfective, by not giving direct expression to the internal structure of a situation irrespective of its objective complexity, has the effect of reducing it to a single point[12].

Besides the traditional ideas which appear in the A-LM textbook, additional ideas are introduced that revolve around an analysis of the "recollected event". A-LM states (pp. 112–113):

> Any event has three phases: a beginning, a middle, and an end. When a Spanish speaker views a past event in terms of its beginning or end, he uses the preterit aspect of the past tense. When he views the middle of a past event as it goes on, he uses the imperfect aspect of the past tense . . .

This statement is a reflection of a discussion found in Stockwell et al. (1965, pp. 134–35) which includes the following examples:

(23) El nene *anduvo* a los seis meses.
(24) El nene *andaba* a los seis meses.
(25) El nene *se cayó.*
(26) El nene *se caía.*

In these examples, (23) is initiative since the child began to walk at six months, i.e., his life history of walking was initiated or begun at this point, while (25) is terminative, since the falling is finished. The two perfective aspects are expressed by the preterite in Spanish. In (24), the child was already walking, i.e., he was in between the beginning and the end of his life history of walking, and in (26), the child was in the process of falling. These last two examples are, of course, instances of the imperfective aspect.

Ramsey and Stockwell et al. offer the same information with regard to the use of the preterite, but Stockwell et al. include such information in a

12 However, Comrie demonstrates in section 1.1.2 of his book that perfectivity can be combined with certain other aspectual properties, in accordance with general morphological and syntactic properties of a given language, thus yielding perfective forms that are clearly not punctual.

framework in which the event is analyzed structurally. Ramsey, on the other hand, presents the information as an item in a list of observations about the preterite in Spanish. Various issues from Stockwell et al.'s framework will now be examined.

Aspect/Time Relation. While perfective forms in Spanish are necessarily past tense, Stockwell et al. state (pp. 135–36) that imperfective forms may be either past or nonpast. The past imperfective forms are those traditionally labeled "imperfect" in Spanish while the non-past imperfective forms are those traditionally labeled "present". Consider the following chart:

PERFECTIVE	Past	habló
IMPERFECTIVE	Non-Past	habla
	Past	hablaba

The authors (ibid., pp. 138–39) compare the imperfective non-past and the imperfective past, saying of the forms *habla* and *hablaba* that the imperfective aspect is the same in both. *Hablaba* is properly considered to be the past of *habla* whereas *habló* is not since it is a perfective form which contrasts directly with no non-past form, only with past imperfective forms. This concept finds support among various authors. For example, Comrie (1976, p. 72) explains:

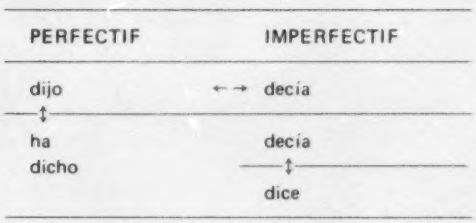
> The Imperfect expresses in past tense an aspectual value that is more typical of the present. In traditional Indo-European linguistics, the Imperfect is often characterized as the 'Present in the Past', which captures the observation that the Imperfect expresses a typically present tense aspectual value in the past tense.

Barrera-Vidal (1972) quotes Howard Keniston[13], saying that the speaker may "transfer himself in imagination to the past and there observe the action or state in precisely the same way in which he observes the

13 Howard Keniston: *Spanish Syntax List,* New York, 1937, 32.2 quoted in Barrera-Vidal, fn. 8, 238.

present; the action or state will appear as an indefinite series, unbroken or intentional, without definite ending"[14].

The following diagram, presented by Barrera-Vidal (ibid., p. 202) includes the present perfect form and helps to further explain the issue:



(A) The present tense *(dice)* and the imperfect *(decía)* are both imperfective, while the contrast is between the present and past tense. (B) The preterite *(dijo)* and the imperfect *(decía)* both pertain to the past tense; the contrast is between perfectivity/imperfectivity. (C) The preterite *(dijo)* and the present perfect *(ha dicho)* are perfective; the contrast lies in the relevance of the event to the Past or the Present[15]. Notice that there is no parallel comparison between the present perfect *(ha dicho)* and the present *(dice)*. The present perfect does not refer to an event oriented in the Past (which would contrast with the present form), but rather, it simply refers to an event occurring anterior to the moment of speaking. (Bull, 1965, p. 166)[16].

Durative/Non-durative. Stockwell et al. (p. 135) state that sentences (23) to (26) refer to *durative* events, i.e., those capable of indefinite extension in time, while (27) and (28) below refer to *non-durative* events, i.e., those not capable of indefinite extension in time[17].

(27) Golpeó la mesa.
(28) Golpeaba la mesa.

14 Barrera-Vidal qualifies this statement, however, with the comment: "Cette définition de l'opposition aspectuelle perfectif/imperfectif néglige par trop, de notre point de vue, l'importance de la pression contraignante de faits de discours." (1972, 238)

15 Bull (1965, 165) states that an event which has overriding current relevance requires the Present Perfect. The Preterite is associated with the past, while the Present Perfect is associated with the present.

16 For further information on the Present Perfect see Comrie, 1976, chapter 3.

17 However, see Comrie's comment on page 41 of this paper.

Fraisse (1948)[18] has demonstrated experimentally that actions lasting less than three seconds are apprehended in a different manner from those lasting more than three seconds. According to his results, the former actions produced a relatively simultaneous perception of duration while the latter actions led to a quantitative or qualitative estimation of duration.

A later experiment by Ferreiro (1971)[19] demonstrated that the youngest native speaker of French[20] used two different tenses systematically, a *present* or *imparfait* for a long duration event, and a *passé composé* for short duration.

Bronckart and Sinclair (1973) corroborate Ferreiro's view that children younger than five or six years apparently use different verb forms to indicate differences in duration. They also found, however, that from the age of six onwards, longer or shorter duration did not seem to influence the choice of verb forms for the description of perfective events. The following section discusses a possible criterion employed by adult speakers in their selection of verb forms.

Like Stockwell et al., William Bull (1960, 1965) views events as having three phases, i.e., initiative, imperfective and terminative. In the workbook accompanying *Communicating in Spanish* (1974), of which Bull is an author, the following examples are given (p. 85):

(29) The little boy fell down and *cried* (began[21] to cry)

(30) The children *were sleeping* (were in the middle of sleeping) when the earthquake struck.

18 P. Fraisse "Etude comparée de la perception et de l'estimation de la durée chez les enfants et les adultes", *Enfance I*, 1948, 199–211, cited in Bronckart and Sinclair, 1973, 113.

19 E. Ferreiro *Les relations temporelles dans le langage de l'enfant*, Genève, Droz, 1971, cited in Bronckart and Sinclair, 1973, 110.

20 Spanish has the same formal distinctions as written French, although the semantic distinction between Simple Past (corresponding to the French Past Definite, e.g., *escribí* 'I wrote' and Perfect, e.g., *he escrito* 'I have written', in particular, is somewhat different. (Comrie, 1976, 127) For further information, see Barrera-Vidal, 1972, and Bull, 1960.
According to Fish (1961, 367), there is a one-way process in Spanish in which *he escrito* may be substituted for *escribí*, but never vice versa. The author suggests that this may be an imitation of the French trend which has eliminated the "Simple Past" from standard oral French almost within the last century.

21 According to Miller and Johnson-Laird (1976, 451) *begin* is based on knowledge of the past. In order to say that something began, the speaker implies that before its initiation, that event had not been occurring.

(31) He *dropped* the glass and it *broke*. (Each event had to be completed before it could be said to have occurred.)

Consider also the following exercise based on this generalization which involves discrimination of the phases represented in each event (ibid.):

(32) When we *arrived* (1) __ at the hotel, it *was* (2) __ already eleven in the evening . . . The following morning we *woke up* (5) __ quite early, before the alarm clock *rang* (6) __ . . .[22]

Notice that the exercise operates completely in English, which is consistent with the idea presented in Bull (1965):

> . . . the first step in teaching the Preterite and Imperfect needs to be training in this new discrimination. This can be done effectively with English examples . . . (p. 170)

Cyclic/Non-cyclic Events. Bull (1960, 1965) presents all events as pertaining to one of two major sets: *cyclic* or *non-cyclic*. While this concept is apparently analogous to Stockwell et al.'s durative/non-durative events, it avoids the pitfalls associated with dependence on temporality[23].

According to Bull (1965), the term *cyclic* refers to events which cannot be observed or reported until they are terminated. When such an event occurs, it terminates automatically, and it cannot be repeated without going through all stages of the cycle again. For example (ibid., p. 168):

(33) I dropped my pencil.
(34) She closed the door.

The term, *non-cyclic*, refers to events which do not have to be finished in order to take place, and once begun, can be kept up without starting over again. For example (Lamadrid et al., 1974b, p. 84):

(35) We saw them both.

Two kinds of exercises given with regard to distinguishing cyclic and non-cyclic events are presented below. The first involves isolated sentences, while the second deals with a narrative passage (Lamadrid et al., 1974a, p. 84; 1974b, p. 129):

(36) He fell out of bed. ___C___NC
He ran on the beach. ___C___NC

22 Answers: (1) terminative, (2) imperfective, (5) terminative, and (6) initiative.
23 Bull replaces time with order as the conceptual basis of tense.

(37) The man . . . suddenly *took out* (1) __ a gun . . .
He *pointed* (2) __ it at Mrs. Jones . . .[24]

Bull (1965) then combines the concepts of event-phases and cyclic/non-cyclic events to develop rules for usage of the preterite and imperfect aspects of the Past tense. He states (pp. 168–69):

> . . . when there is no context other than what is needed to define RP[25], the Preterite regularly indicates the initiative aspect of non-cyclic events and the terminative aspect of cyclic events.

The following Spanish examples are presented by Bull to illustrate this point (ibid.):

(38) A la una *murió.*
(39) A la una *oyó* el ruido.

In (38), the event terminates at one o'clock, while in (39) it begins at one o'clock. *Morir* represents a cyclic event while *oír* labels a non-cyclic event. Bull concludes that, "the classical rule which states that the preterite refers to an event completed in the Past does not describe the facts". (ibid.) An excellent example is provided by Gili Gaya (1973, p. 150):

> "Dijo Dios: sea la luz, y la luz fue" significa que la luz comenzó a tener existencia completa o perfecta, aunque la luz es y seguirá siendo; su existencia no ha terminado.

Earlier in this paper, it was demonstrated that the imperfect differs from the present only in tense since they are both imperfective. Bull (1965) advances a step further to describe the imperfect as a "backshift" of the present in that it represents planned actions that have yet to be executed in the past. For example, the backshift of (40) is (41):

(40) Dice que se casan.
'He says they're getting married'
(41) Dijo que se casaban.
'He said they were getting married'

In neither of these sentences has the marriage yet taken place. But when the preterite (which is perfective) combines with a verb of reporting or observation, an event is described as occurring anterior to the event of reporting. Consider the following examples in which the marriage has already taken place prior to the moment of speaking (ibid., p. 167):

24 Answers: (36) C, NC; (37) C, NC (C = cyclic and NC = non-cyclic)
25 RP represents the Past, as opposed to PP which represents the present moment of speaking.

(42) Dice que se casaron.
'He says they got married'
(43) Dijo que se casaron.
'He said they got married'

Based on the contrast between examples like (41) and (43) above, one is led perhaps to define perfectivity (as represented by the preterite) as a so-called 'resultative', i.e., indicating the successful completion of a situation[26]. Thus, sentence (41) differs from (43) since in the latter all the steps leading to the completion of the marriage ceremony were carried out successfully.

This 'resultative' definition of the perfective may be attacked for putting "unnecessary emphasis on the final stage of the situation rather than on its totality" (just as the term, 'completed' did). (Comrie, 1976, p. 21) The example which Comrie cites is the past tense of *saber: supe* and *sabía.* The 'resultative' explanation would claim that *supe* refers to the successful completion of 'realizing' or 'coming to know', i.e., 'finding out about something'; *sabía* refers, rather, to some time during the act of 'knowing' or 'coming to know'[27]. Comrie argues that *supe* is not the 'result' of *sabía* but vice versa, that *sabía,* 'the state of knowing something', refers to the result of *supe,* 'realizing something'. (ibid.)

Bull reaches a similar conclusion which logically proceeds from the concept of cyclic/non-cyclic events and their phases. His formulation of the preterite and imperfect eliminates the need for special rules to deal with verbs like *supe/sabía* and *conocí/conocía.* 'To know', in the sense of possessing knowledge, and 'to know', in the sense of being acquainted with, are characteristically non-cyclic events since they are definable at their inception and they may be continued without beginning again. Thus, verbs like *conocer* and *saber* do not differ from verbs referring to other non-cyclic events. The preterite *(supe, conocí)* indicates initiative aspect or the beginning of knowing, while the imperfect *(sabía, conocía)* describes the event in progress. (1965, pp. 169–170)

A-LM differentiates the forms as follows (1962, p. 114):

> The difference between the initiative phase of past events (shown by the preterit aspect in Spanish) and the continuative phase (shown by the imperfect aspect) is, in English, quite generally a lexical distinction, not a grammatical one.

26 See the statement by Lyons (1968) on p. 36 and the quotation from the A-LM text on p. 40 of this paper.
27 See example 12).

Examples given to illustrate this point include *supo* 'he learned', *sabía* 'he knew', *conoció* 'he met', and *conocía* 'he knew'. (ibid.)

Unfortunately, the Spanish speaker's way of organizing reality is thoroughly disguised by standard English translation as it is employed here. Bull (1965, p. 70) says:

> English uses three different verbs: *to know, to meet,* and *to find out.* Two of these *(to meet* and *to find out)* label cyclic events and represent, consequently, a different way of organizing the same reality. As a result, it is improper to define the Spanish meaning by these translations.

In summary, (1) The imperfect aspect of the past tense expresses habitual or customary actions and describes a condition in the past. The problems inherent to translation of the Spanish imperfect into English are discussed in terms of the combination or separation of "progressive" and "habitual" meaning.

(2) The preterite aspect of the past tense represents action completed in the past, but it cannot express a situation with limited as opposed to unlimited duration. These two issues were seen to arise from classical oppositions in Greek of perfective/imperfective (differing in duration) and of imperfective/aorist (differing in completion).

A-LM's claim that "length of time has nothing to do with which aspect is used", a notion which combats classical notions, is discussed in light of several psycholinguistic experiments correlating aspect with duration.

In addition, the imperfective and perfective are contrasted, as are the present and imperfect and the preterite and present perfect. The imperfect is seen as a backshift of the present, and the issue arises of defining the perfective as 'resultative' but is attacked using as counterexamples the past tense forms of *saber* and *conocer.* These examples are seen to support Bull's system in which the preterite indicates initiative aspect while the imperfect describes the event in progress.

(3) Traditionally, the preterite indicates that an act began or ended. This concept is made more precise in the system developed by Bull (1960, 1965) in which the preterite indicates the initiative aspect of non-cyclic events and the terminative aspect of non-cyclic events. Such events are analogous to Stockwell et al.'s durative/non-durative events, but they avoid the problems associated with a dependance on time.

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